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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 6 May 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, by which the Assembly established the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group to provide advice to the Secretary-General on the use and impact of the Fund.

In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of the resolution, I hereby transmit a note on the first meeting of 2016 of the Advisory Group, which was held in New York on 21 and 22 March (see annex).

On an exceptional basis, the Advisory Group advanced its first meeting in order to prepare for the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit, taking into consideration the report of the Secretary-General entitled "One humanity: shared responsibility", which contains the Agenda for Humanity, and to address issues relevant to the Fund that will be discussed at the high-level leaders' round table on investing in humanity to be held in May 2016.

As summarized in the note, the Advisory Group received a briefing on the use and management of the Fund during the period since its previous meeting, held in October 2015, until mid-March 2016. The Group was advised that the Fund was projecting a funding shortfall of $50 million by the end of 2016 with respect to the annual funding target of $450 million. The Emergency Relief Coordinator emphasized that the heavy demand for funds had persisted as a result of overwhelming global humanitarian needs. The Group reiterated the need for the Fund to be well resourced since the Fund was central to timely and predictable life-saving responses worldwide. In that respect, it was vital that all efforts, including outreach to new donors, be made to enable the Fund to reach its annual funding target in 2016.

The Advisory Group welcomed and endorsed the call for the funding target of the Fund to be expanded to $1 billion by 2018 and echoed the emerging broad consensus that the expanded Fund should maintain its speed, scope and life-saving focus, while increasing its scale of response and impact. The Group emphasized the

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importance of meeting the new target, including by urgently diversifying the donor base to complement the contributions of the current top donors.

The Advisory Group asked all Member States, in particular core supporters of the Fund, and senior officials of the United Nations, to be at the forefront of those efforts. It encouraged the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue to provide leadership and guidance, with the support of the Fund secretariat, for the ongoing advocacy and engagement that will lay the foundation for the future of the Fund.

The Advisory Group received updates on policy issues, including the year-end analysis of information contained in the reports of resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators on the use and impact of the funds allocated in 2014; the finalization of a policy for communication in the event of fraudulent use of the funds; and the findings from independent reviews of the added value of the Fund in the context of the crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and in South Sudan, and the humanitarian emergency situation in Iraq.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

Annex

Note on the meeting of the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group held on 21 and 22 March 2016

Summary of the meeting

1. The Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group was established by the General Assembly in resolution 60/124 in order to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the use and impact of the Fund. The first meeting of the Group in 2016 was held in New York on 21 and 22 March and was chaired by Manuel Bessler (Switzerland).

2. On an exceptional basis, the Advisory Group advanced the dates of its first meeting of 2016 in order to prepare for the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit, taking into consideration the report of the Secretary-General entitled "One humanity: shared responsibility", which contains the Agenda for Humanity", and to address issues relevant to the Fund that will be discussed at the high-level leaders' round table on investing in humanity to be held in May 2016.

3. The Secretary-General met with the Advisory Group and emphasized the vital role that the Fund plays in United Nations humanitarian efforts. In his report, the Secretary-General called upon Advisory Group members to provide advice and support for the concerted efforts to expand the funding target of the Fund to $1 billion by 2018.

4. The Emergency Relief Coordinator briefed the Advisory Group on the use and management of the Fund during the period since its previous meeting, held in October 2015, until mid-March 2016. After the briefing, a discussion was held on the future of the Fund in the context of the recommendation of the Secretary-General recommendation to expand the funding target to $1 billion. The Group then discussed resource mobilization, advocacy and communication activities for the Fund in 2016.

5. In addition, the Group received and considered updates on key policy issues, including the analysis of information contained in the reports of resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators on the use and impact of the funds allocated in 2014; on the implementation of the Fund's communication policy in the event of fraudulent use of the funds; on findings from the independent reviews of the added value of the Fund for the regional response to the crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and in South Sudan and to the humanitarian needs in Iraq; and on monitoring guidance for field staff with respect to the Fund.

6. The Advisory Group met with representatives of recipient agencies and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. In its interaction with them, the Group focused primarily on the future of the Fund and the timeliness of sub-grants between recipient agencies and their implementing partners.

7. Further to those discussions, the Advisory Group made the observations and recommendations set out below.

Observations, conclusions and recommendations

8. The Advisory Group welcomed the briefing by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the use and management of the Fund from October 2015 until mid-March 2016, which included an update on the 2015 and 2016 funding status and an overview of humanitarian operations supported by the Fund during that period. The Emergency Relief Coordinator emphasized that, in line with overwhelming global humanitarian needs, the heavy demand for funds had persisted and advised that the Fund was projecting a funding shortfall of $50 million by the end of 2016 with respect to the annual funding target of $450 million.

9. The Emergency Relief Coordinator also provided highlights of key Fund allocations. He indicated that the Fund had been at the forefront of the response to the humanitarian consequences of the El Niño climatic phenomenon in 15 countries and had supported emergency assistance in the Lake Chad Basin region as a result of Boko Haram-related violence and in silent and severely underfunded emergency operations conducted in nine countries (Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Libya, Mali, Sudan, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania).

10. The Group reconfirmed the vital role of the Fund for enabling effective, timely and life-saving humanitarian responses worldwide. The Fund had achieved a formidable track record over the past 10 years in terms of speed, scale of response and impact on saving lives worldwide.

11. The Advisory Group welcomed and endorsed the call of the Secretary-General for the funding target of the Fund to be expanded to $1 billion by 2018 and echoed the emerging broad consensus that the expanded Fund should maintain its speed, scope and life-saving focus, while increasing its scale of response and impact.

12. The Fund stakeholders present at the meeting were encouraged to scale up their advocacy and political support for the expanded Fund in the lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit and to ensure that the Fund's expansion featured adequately in the major ongoing processes. These would include the contribution of the Fund to the "grand bargain" proposed by the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and the core commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit high-level leaders' round table on investing in humanity. In addition, the Advisory Group emphasized the importance of meeting the new funding target, including by urgently diversifying the donor base to complement the contributions of the current top donors.

13. The Advisory Group called upon all Member States, in particular core supporters of the Fund, and senior officials of the United Nations to be at the forefront of those efforts. The Group encouraged the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue to provide leadership and guidance, with the support of the Fund secretariat, for the ongoing advocacy and engagement that will lay the foundation for the future of the Fund. Building on the Fund's successful 10-year track record, the Group also emphasized the importance of making a compelling case for the Fund, focusing on evidence and results to further attract new donors and enhance commitment from existing ones.

14. Upon receiving the update on the Fund's resource mobilization, advocacy and communication activities for 2016, Advisory Group members reiterated the need for a well-resourced Fund, which was central to enabling timely and predictable life-

saving responses worldwide. In that respect, it was vital that all efforts, including outreach to new donors, be made to enable the Fund to reach its annual funding target in 2016. The Group also welcomed the recent efforts of the Fund to explore innovative financing opportunities and encouraged the Fund secretariat to proceed with the ongoing activities and to keep the Group informed during the process. In addition, the Group agreed that the Fund's innovative financing solutions could have the potential to serve as a pilot for the broader humanitarian community.

15. The Advisory Group expressed appreciation for the significant improvements in the Fund's evidence-based advocacy and outreach activities, noting that efforts should be stepped up to increase the Fund's visibility and to demonstrate the added value and comparative advantage of the Fund across multiple communication platforms. The members of the Group also acknowledged their role in advocating for the Fund, including to achieve the annual target, through active outreach at the national and regional levels and through their peer networks, and requested the Fund secretariat to provide a clear plan and readily available information and communication material to support their advocacy efforts.

16. In response to the update on key policy issues, the Advisory Group expressed its particular appreciation for the work undertaken by the Fund secretariat with respect to the analysis of performance data from resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator reports on the use and impact of funds allocated in 2014. The Group recommended that the information on the individuals assisted by with the funds, on partnerships through sub-granting and on the added value of the Fund be presented in a more coherent and easily understandable manner that would appeal to the wider public. Such improvements would allow for an even better contextualization and representation of what the Fund undertakes.

17. The Advisory Group members also discussed the Fund's role in large-scale protracted emergencies, including those resourced through the underfunded emergencies window, welcomed the flexibility of the response of the Fund and noted the importance of the Fund maintaining a life-saving focus also in such crises.

18. The Advisory Group members also emphasized that the timeliness of sub-granting and the focus on partnerships were central to demonstrating the effectiveness of the Fund and would thus play an important role in any future outreach and efforts to support and advocate for the expanded funding target of the Fund. The importance of positioning the Fund correctly in the overall humanitarian landscape was noted. While only the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system and the International Organization for Migration could access the Fund directly, the Fund should not be perceived as benefitting only the United Nations since it allows the Organization to add value to the broader humanitarian system.

19. The Advisory Group received a briefing on the implementation of the Fund's communication policy in the event of fraudulent use of the funds and was notified of a case of potential misuse of the funds by a recipient agency's implementing partner. The members recognized the ongoing work in relation to the potential fraudulent use of the funds and welcomed in particular the guidance note on communicating the fraudulent use of Central Emergency Response Fund funds and standard operating procedures for handling potential fraud. The Group recommended that the standard operating procedures elaborate further on the timeline in order to ensure the timely communication of fraud or the potential

misuse of funds to donors and that they properly reflect the discretionary role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to determine at what point information on the potential fraudulent use of the funds would be shared with donors, given the associated reputational risks. The Group also reiterated the need to include the topic as their standing agenda item and encouraged the Fund secretariat to keep abreast of relevant developments with partner agencies regarding risk management. The Emergency Relief Coordinator concluded the discussion by acknowledging the critical nature of the issue and the importance of keeping donors informed though timely and regular communications by the Fund.

20. Upon being briefed on the preliminary and final findings from the two independent reviews of the added value of the Fund for the regional responses to the crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and in South Sudan and to the humanitarian needs in Iraq unrelated to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Advisory Group welcomed the reviews and reiterated that they proved to be timely insights into the operations of the Fund, highlighting challenges, opportunities and lessons learned.

21. The Advisory Group applauded the recent agreement by the United Nations Controller to reduce programme support costs levied by the Secretariat from 3 to 2 per cent, effective 1 June 2016. This would increase efficiency, release more funds for humanitarian action and make the Fund even more attractive to donors to channel their humanitarian assistance for global life-saving action. It was noted that a decrease in programme support costs should have no impact on the coverage of the Fund secretariat's operational requirements.

22. The Advisory Group members also welcomed the work undertaken towards further enhancing the transparency of the Fund's allocations and stressed the importance of the availability of real-time allocation information for public consumption. They welcomed the recent developments in relation to the methodology and process pertaining to the allocations through the Fund's underfunded emergencies window, pointing specifically to the transparency of the allocation model, its added value for external stakeholders and the additional donor outreach to complement the allocation.

23. The Advisory Group welcomed the opportunity to meet and exchange views with the recipient agencies and implementing partners of Central Emergency Response Fund funds. The Group also reiterated the usefulness of including this interaction as a standing agenda item for its meetings. It welcomed the support that the recipient agencies expressed for the expansion of the funding target of the Fund, which it saw as the crucial enabler of their response. While the Group recognized the work done to date with regard to the issues of timeliness, sub-granting and partnerships, it reiterated that rapid disbursement of the funds from agencies to their implementing partners remained central to the Fund's life-saving mandate and that it was crucial for maintaining the Fund's reputation as an effective humanitarian financing mechanism. In that respect, it encouraged further improvements, for example, through the introduction of agency-specific benchmarks and internal targets. Several agencies reiterated the need to look at the timeliness data in context, in that, for example, disbursements to partners might intentionally occur at different phases of the project cycle according to implementation plans.

Administrative matters

24. Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko (South Africa) was selected as the new Vice-Chair of the Advisory Group.

25. The Advisory Group expressed its thanks to the outgoing members whose mandates would end in 2016 — Eltje Aderhold (Germany), Ahmed Al-Meraikhi (Qatar), Jozef Andriessen (the Netherlands), Nestor Koko (Côte d'Ivoire), Jette Michelsen (Denmark) and Julius Oketta (Uganda) — for their contribution to the work of the Group.

26. The next meeting of the Advisory Group will be held in late 2016.